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ON A CURVE

ARCHITECT GISUE HARIRI GOES FOR THE UNEXPECTED AT HER PARK AVENUE APARTMENT WITH SCULPTURAL ELEMENTS AND PLENTY OF WHITE SPACE

TEXT BY DAVID COLMAN · PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM WALDRON · PRODUCED BY ELIZABETH SVERBEYEFF BYRON

What architect doesn't want to have a go at Main Street? It is, after all, one of those places that, abounding with every set-in-stone design association, is an irresistible temptation for an iconoclast.

So when Gisue Hariri, the elder of contemporary architecture's famed sister team, Hariri & Hariri, went looking for a Manhattan apartment with her husband, Bahman Kia, a manufacturing executive, she decided to take on Park Avenue—as close to Main Street as New York offers. "I wanted Park Avenue to have its first loft," says Hariri. And with parks and museums within walking distance, not to mention schools for the couple's daughters, Iman and Ava, it was just the family-friendly setting she wanted.

The building Hariri picked, however, was not: a 1960s modernish structure whose interior was, well, not exactly what the Modernists had in mind. "You come in and see the lobby and think, What is this?

And you get in the elevator, and it's worse, and you come out on the landing, and it's really bad," she says, laughing. "And then you open the door!"

Indeed. Today, stepping over the threshold to the family's apartment is akin to crossing over to another dimension. Though out the living room windows you can see the stately brickwork with Venetian-arch details of the building across Park Avenue—a kind of tony backdrop—the place glows with such polished cool that you half expect Keanu Reeves to pop by in a black coat and sunglasses muttering about that inscrutable nemesis, the Architect. In this matrix, however, the architect is the hero, having tackled the dignified and often-stagnant establishment of the Upper East Side and shown 'em how to think outside the classic-six box.

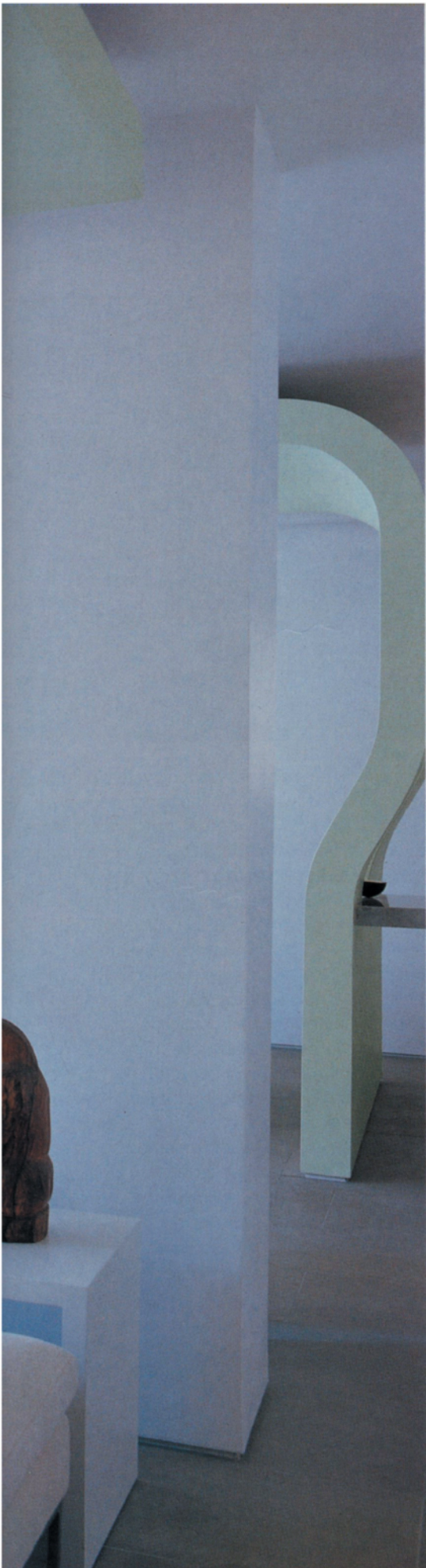
What attracted Hariri to the dull postwar building was, oddly enough, the same thing that attracted so

Facing page: Architect Gisue Hariri with her husband, Bahman Kia, and their daughters, Ava and Iman, in the family's Park Avenue apartment, which she designed. This page: In the living area, one of the two pale-green "folding planes" Hariri created of plaster and plywood with cutout gold-leaf niches; the Charles sofa is by B&B Italia, and the Tibetan rug is by Odegard. See Resources.



Saarinens Womb chair and ottoman by Knoll and a Chelsea cocktail table by Catherine Memmi in the living area; the copper bowls are by Michael Aram. Facing page, from top: A Saarinen table and Tulip chairs in the dining area; the rug is by Odegard. Modernica's Cloud sofa forms a cozy seating area in the kitchen; the side table is by West Elm, the cabinetry is by IKEA, and the oven and cooktop are by Dacor. See Resources.







many uptowners downtown: a tabula rasa. While she didn't rid the apartment of its walls, Hariri gutted almost everything else—every trapping, fixture, and surface—and then started anew, chalking the outlines of one big space (kitchen and dining and living areas) with painfully plain white walls and the footprint of a warm-gray limestone floor.

Most Modernists would stop there, but Hariri took it a step further. She divided this area with one of the architectural coups de théâtre for which she and her sister Mojgan have become known, creating “folding planes,” as Hariri calls them, pale-pistachio plaster-and-plywood wall pieces that climb from the floor and curve along the ceiling like abstract trees. The two structures articulate the dining and living areas by implication rather than definition, suggesting rooms within the larger open space, the way a four-poster suggests a chamber inside the chamber.

Besides serving an aesthetic purpose, the pieces are quite functional, carrying electrical conduits up to the ceiling for lighting. The rest of the apartment, though, hasn't undergone nearly as radical a transformation. The kitchen is outfitted with cabinets and a sliding door. And the bedrooms are defined by those lovable throwbacks to architecture's dark ages—walls and doors. But then, as Hariri points out, she didn't have the wherewithal for the full treatment. “I learned pretty quickly that I couldn't afford Hariri & Hariri,” she says, laughing. So she kept the

basic materials simple, working with a palette of grays and cool whites. All the floors in the private quarters are laid with metallic polka-dot matting, and the master bathroom suite is clad, floor, walls, and countertop, in streaked-gray Carrara marble.

But some Hariri fans might look at the design and cry foul. In this cerebrally edgy place that feels like anywhere—Milan, São Paulo, Mars—but Park Avenue, the architect succumbed to touches of elegance befitting her new address. Within her high-concept folds are cutout niches decked out in gold leaf. Rounded shapes like a Noguchi-style sofa, Saarinen chairs, and hand-hewn copper bowls make the rooms friendlier, more casual; the low surfaces of a B&B Italia sofa and a massive Catherine Memmi cocktail table are striking but also inviting. And underneath it all are soft-toned Tibetan carpets, a far cry from her signature stark industrial chic.

“I was definitely seduced,” she acknowledges. “But I am still an artist. And I do love it up here. It has started to transform me.” That goes both ways. “To my surprise, my Park Avenue friends think the apartment is just fantastic,” she says, “so maybe we'll get an opportunity to do something else here.”

Her husband is even more convinced. “There are a lot of Modernists living in hiding on Park Avenue, and when they see our place, they're in awe,” says Kia. “I think Park Avenue is ready for a revolution.” Perhaps, but is the revolution ready for Park Avenue? ■

A Cosimo bed from Design Within Reach in the master bedroom; the Tolomeo lamps are by Artemide, and the carpet is by Chilewich. Facing page, from left: Drawings by Iman and Ava mix with other artwork in the master bedroom's sitting area; the Bertoia chairs are by Knoll, the Eames table is from Herman Miller, and Poul Christiansen's Le Klint ceiling light is from Design Within Reach. Hari's bathroom, one of two master baths, is sheathed in Carrara marble; the sink is by Waterworks, and the fittings are from AF New York. See Resources.

